

gather

FOR FAITH AND ACTION

September 2011



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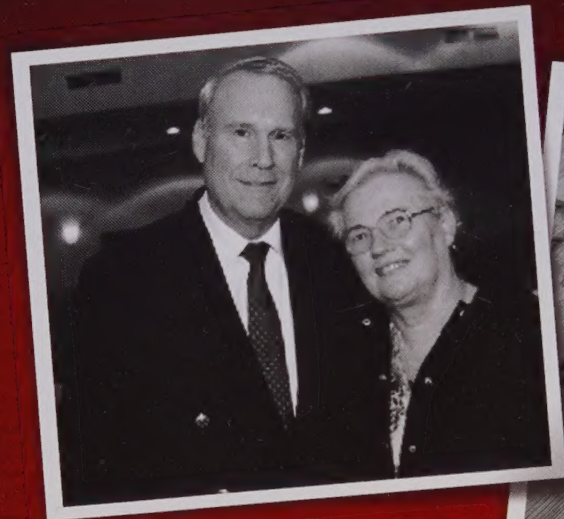
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Burning Bush Chaser
We've Got People

Back in Jesus' Day
Women of Mystery





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TRAVELING MERCIES

VOLUME 24 NUMBER 7 SEPTEMBER 2011

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gathermagazine.org



VOICES

Gather Us In

by Kate Sprutta Elliott

A couple of years ago,

I was on a panel at a writers' conference and brought some copies of this magazine to give away. After my talk, a young woman took a copy. The next morning she stopped me and told me she never picked up the magazine at church because she thought she was "too young to read it." She assumed it was for the older women involved in Bible study circle and quilting—not for someone like her. But having read it, she found articles that really inspired her. She loved it and became a subscriber.

That is one of many stories we've heard over the last few years. We've heard from folks who stereotype the magazine and its readers, as did the woman at the conference. We've heard from young women who thought *Lutheran Woman Today* sounded dated (as one woman said, it sounds like something from the 1950s). So we did research and called groups of women together to see what they thought. We did paper and online surveys, brainstorming sessions, focus groups, and met with a consultant. The result of that effort is the name on the front cover of this magazine.

We believe that *Gather* will help us open our magazine to a wider, more inclusive audience—women of all ages who live out their faith in many ways—but who come together to "affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness" (from Women of the ELCA's purpose statement). We have heard from clergy who

belong to our full-communion partners without a women's magazine. They say that they love our Bible study and articles, but feel uncomfortable promoting a magazine with another denomination's name in the title. We hope that *Gather* will answer that.

The articles, columns, and Bible study will continue to be the award-winning content that you've come to enjoy. This issue begins the new Bible study on the Gospel of Mark. We think you'll find it to be a terrific study—Mark is full of amazing stories. Our writer, the Rev. Patricia Lull, does an excellent job of bringing readers into the action.

Other articles this month address what daily life was like during the time of Jesus, reflect on the women who were the early disciples, describe how one woman lives out her discipleship today, and tackle the issue of mental illness. The columns discuss health, prayer, family life, and current events. As always, we're glad you're joining us in this conversation!

This is a good time to share the magazine with others—new folks at church; women who have long been members, but not connected to our organization; friends and younger women who might see this magazine with new eyes. You know how you feel when you read an article that particularly moves or encourages you. Share that feeling with the other women in your life and help them grow in faith! 🌿

Kate Sprutta Elliott is editor of *Gather*. You may contact her at gather@elca.org.

What do you think of the new name?
Let us know at gather@elca.org.



GIVE US THIS DAY

Weekend of Hope

by Bonita Bock

At each board meeting of the Abrahamic Initiative (AI), of which I am a member, our chairperson asks one of us how the initiative has made a difference in our lives. Jews, Muslims, and Christians take turns answering—and the responses are profound. I get to know more deeply my colleagues' faith, and I also hear sacred texts of my own Christian tradition come alive in a new way through the eyes of another. I've come to understand why the faith traditions from Father Abraham differ in practice when our stories are much the same.

Ten years after 9/11, I am thankful for these dear friends. We have worked to understand each other. We meet, have dinner, and host public events for the broader community to join us in this dialogue. Our joy is tempered by knowing the statistics: negative attitude toward other faiths has hardened since 9/11.

My mom once told me that when she was a child walking home from grade school, her friends from the Lutheran school and the kids walking home from the Roman Catholic school would throw rocks at each other. We have come a long way since then. I hope we can stop throwing rocks at everyone. When people of faith come together, whatever their faith, I find a powerful sense of the Holy present.

I felt this in Senegal in 2010 when an ELCA delegation observed Christian/Muslim dialogues. The Lutheran Church of Senegal provides leadership to the ongoing conversations. In addition to theological discussions, such meetings

led people to plant trees together to halt de-forestation. As people invest in their future together, they are committed to keeping the peace. They believe this is God's will for their country.

Last October, the Abrahamic Initiative and several other faith groups participated in planting a peace forest in Denver, Colo. Over 100 trees were planted as the scriptures from various traditions were read.

Two verses have long guided my involvement in interfaith activities. One is "Judge not lest ye be judged" (Matthew 7:1). I remember my confirmation pastor counseling us that our lives were our witness, and we were not to judge the lives of others—that is God's job. The other is "I am doing a new thing" (Isaiah 43:19). The kids from my mom's community who quit throwing stones at each other found that Lutherans and Catholics could live peacefully with one another—a new thing for its time. How am I to understand these verses today?

God seems to be bringing us together in ways beyond our imagination. I would never have dreamed I'd be visiting Muslims and Christians in Senegal were it not for my church inviting me to go and meet them. Now representatives from faith groups in Denver are hosting a series of activities on the 10th anniversary of 9/11. With hope for the future, I'm thankful to God for this witness. 🌿

The Rev. Bonita Bock is lecturer in religion and co-director of Wartburg College West in Denver, Colo., an extension program of Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa.

To learn more about the ELCA's commitment to ecumenical and inter-religious relationships, go to www.elca.org/ecumenical/interreligious.

Burning Bush Chaser

by Martha Sterne



My friend Barbara Thompson looks like a very cute, very short, slightly chubby (but not quite as chubby as I am, which I mention in case she reads this and gets huffy) 50-ish Santa's helper. She has big blue eyes that are often laughing except when she is intent on getting in your pocketbook (more about that later). She has a mesmerizing voice and when my cell phone vibrates and her name comes up, I have two coincidental and opposing thought flashes: "Uh-oh" because I know she wants something, and "Yay" because she is hilarious and wise.

She has had quite the journey. I don't think she had some great plan, but what I know about her after long years of friendship is that she has these moments when she spots a fire burning in some bush somewhere up a steep hill or down in a swamp or across a raging river (never the conveniently placed burning bushes), she trudges over and pays attention.

She did not really start out to be a burning bush chaser. She started out as a freelance writer. For years she would do articles or books for people about their families or their business or any other subject that they wanted to spread around. And she would go through her days writing well and being a good citizen and friend and living a fairly useful and responsible life, an orderly writer's life. But every once in a while she would say to herself, you know I have this funny feeling. I think my life is smaller than I am. I just think my life is smaller than I am.

CHILDREN OF WAR

Barbara got some gig out of the country, and somehow she saw not just a burning bush but a conflagration—which is what happens to kids in war—in Uganda I think or maybe Nicaragua. And that relentless and sickening centuries-old story just kept coming back and back: the aching soul-deep wounds to children by the deaths of parents and family and social networks, the brutality of family displacements into no-way-out refugee camps,

and the maiming and killing of children in national and international power plays that include the recruitment of kids as skinny little cannon-fodder soldiers.

The story just would not go away. It stayed in her head and troubled her at night and she would question: Why is the world like this? What possible reason could be right enough to have as collateral damage the killing of children and the destruction of families and communities?

In the 90s she went to Bosnia while the war there was still raging, chasing this same story of children of war. And when I first knew her, she was interviewing Bosnian refugee children and teenagers here in Georgia for a big national magazine article. She was working on a tight deadline, and she had given her number to the kids she had interviewed in case they thought of anything else they wanted to say in the article.

Sure enough, she was working and writing and the phone rings. It is this young girl's troubled, soft voice twisting around the unfamiliar English and the girl says could you come meet my family? And Barbara says, well, you see I'm working on this very important article—you know the one about children of war—and so I'm very busy. I'm really very busy. And there was a pause, an intense quietness.

And somehow there was a moment. And a small but unmistakable burning bush kind of glimmered. And Barbara knew to look up from her article and arise and follow the girl's invitation.

She went to a dark little apartment that some understaffed refugee resettlement organization had found for the family and then just left them there. Little food, one light, no table, no chairs, no bed, no extra clothes, the adults with no English—just a totally lost and demoralized Bosnian family—a grandmamma and a mama and a daddy and their little child and two teens, all of them sitting on the bare floor since there was no place else. And the writer sat there with them on the floor, even though you know she really had this deadline on this

very important article to get done about the children of war.

They talked haltingly and they smiled together and something began to glow. She saw whatever it is we see in people that makes them real and deep and beautiful and worth troubling over. I believe it is that we see the glory of the face of Christ in them, which is the best burning bush of all. And she made some calls on her cell phone, and you know what happened.

A JUST WORLD

Gifts came for that Bosnian family, gifts from her friends and her church (which happened to be my church at the time), gifts of furniture and food and light and love and friendship and job referrals for the stranger, for the alien. Perhaps you have seen the glory of this home-gifting in your church, maybe in several ways like Habitat for Humanity or refugee ministries. And if not, think about it and see what starts glimmering.

For a congregation to hear someone say, "I was a stranger and you took me in. I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me to drink." A church never gets over the glory of hearing those words.

Back to this particular story. From that one evening, Barbara and her gang helped refugee family after family after family get on their feet and find jobs and even buy homes in this bountiful land. It behooves us to remember that almost all of us (except the ones who came in chains) come from some place that wasn't safe or where we weren't particularly wanted or needed.

The years went by and Barbara handed off the refugee resettlement ministry at our church, though she kept the friends. And she went back to a simple, orderly writer's life. But every once in a while she

had that little nagging thought again: I think my life is smaller than I am. I am pretty sure my life is smaller than I am.

One night she went to Columbia Seminary to hear Walter Brueggemann, the fiercest Old Testament scholar that I have ever known, and the class was packed. She looked all around the classroom of about 120 seats and she saw a little glimmer of a possibility of a seat over on the other side of the room, a little smoldering twig of a seat to which she made a beeline. And she sat down next to a man she didn't know and now there were no seats left.

Walter Brueggemann started weaving his magic—I think it was Isaiah that night—and he dreamed a dream with the class of a just world, a world of abundance and wisdom and mercy and holy mountains and new shoots growing out of old stumps. And Barbara and the stranger next to her listened to the old covenant made new through Dr. Brueggemann and the class took heart. She said you could feel it.

She and the stranger sitting next to her talked a little bit at the break. She found out that the man was the principal of one of Atlanta's well-known private schools. And the break ended and they went back to listening to the lecture. When it was over the man went to head out one door and she headed toward another exit, and he turned around in the door backlit from the

Have you experienced any burning bushes
on your journey of discipleship?

Have you ever chased one?

Do you ever wonder if your life
feels a little too small?

lights of the hall beyond. And he looked back at her and she looked at him and there was this glimmering burning-bush moment.

GETTING INTO POCKETBOOKS

What hidden possibilities of glory did they see to make these words tumble out? Barbara said, "By the way, if you are ever interested in starting a school for refugee children let me know." And the man, Bill Moon, said, "For 25 years I've been wanting to start a school for refugee children." And they looked at each other in the glow of the light of Christ. And their lives were redirected in a flaming moment of the eternal *Yes*.

And they did start a school—kindergarten through sixth grade, an amazing place, with teachers from public and private schools and college volunteers, and adult refugees. Picture this: The adult refugee classroom assistants were women who were dodging bombs and burying their dead all over the world maybe one year before. Maybe nine months before.

But you have to get into wallets to open a school. I have no idea how she does it, but Barbara does. I think she ought to teach classes on getting in people's pocketbooks and checkbooks because it makes everybody feel so much better to see what can happen when money and passion get together for some project, *any* project that honors God and loves neighbor. I think Barbara ought to get paid big bucks to tell us how to get in each other's wallets. Call her up but I warn you, she will get in your pocket (in a good way), too.

Barbara and her chance companion and then a nun and then many others brought together their histories and professional skills—and their anguish for the children of the world—and a new thing sprung forth. For these folks knew a profoundly holy and powerful thing. They knew that love for children everywhere has to find its incarnation in some particular place with some particular children. And a miracle for refugee children and their families has happened in our city of Atlanta.

FLAMING POSSIBILITIES

That's the way burning bushes work isn't it? In a God-given moment that you didn't expect and couldn't have planned, you catch sight of the glimmering of some holy flame and your life opens up and you go out. You find yourself on a journey, following the glimmering to a place you never knew—where you can give your gifts and receive the holy gifts of others—by the Love of God, through the Grace of Christ, in the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

You never know. There are these moments glowing with possibility and power for each of us if we will notice. You never know when. You never know where. It is true that the flaming glory of the Lord is everywhere, but human beings need to see it somewhere in somebody in particular. And when we do see the glory of the Lord gleaming in somebody, then everybody else we see has flaming possibilities too.

By the way, Barbara is doing fine. She got itchy a couple of years ago and started up a refugee girls' high school, teaming up this time with another church and the city of Decatur, Ga., and Agnes Scott College and a rag-tag army of volunteers. For instance, two of my 70-year-old friends are teaching the girls how to play basketball (which I would conservatively guess my friends have not attempted in 50 years), but the girls are having a ball, burkas flying and laughter and joy. You never know.

By the way, Barbara is taking a break this year writing and staying mostly up on a mountain in North Carolina. But I know she is probably beginning to tell herself, "I think just now my life is a little too small. I am pretty sure right this minute my life is smaller than I am." No telling what flame she will see glimmering from there. 🌿

The Rev. Martha Sterne is associate rector at Holy Innocents' Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Ga. She is the author of two books: *Earthly Good* and *Alive and Loose in the Ordinary*. She and her husband, Carroll, have two grown children and two grandchildren.



LET US PRAY

Here in This Place!

by Julie K. Aageson

September is a time of new beginnings. Together with other new beginnings—the calendar year that begins in January or the church year beginning with Advent—it's a time for refocusing, starting fresh, and tackling responsibilities that perhaps were set aside for summer rest and relaxation.

When I began writing this column two years ago this month, I recall feeling woefully inadequate about the discipline and practice of prayer. Gracious editors assured me that I was not alone and gave me freedom to write about many topics. I knew I had to be truthful about my own wrestling with faith and life including prayer. Most of all, I hoped to connect with and honor you, the readers, in our shared journeys of faith.

Two full years and 20 columns down, I think of each of you now. I think about the last many months, all of us schlepping along living lives that are marked by constant change, sorrow and loss, joy and contentment. I think about our common struggles to make meaning and sense of the roads we all travel. And I'm reminded of Marty Haugen's words, "Here in this place the new light is streaming, now is the darkness vanished away; see in this space our fears and our dreamings brought here to you in the light of this day."*

I like to think of this place as space for new light, a place to continue sharing common fears and dreaming. Some of us will begin a new school year this month. Some will return to work after the summer break. Many of us will jump

into fall programs that are part of church life. Some will simply note the change of seasons and move on. Whether young or old, we are part of something bigger than ourselves. Joined to the body of Christ, we are called to be light, called to be salt, called to be hope—for the whole human race!

In this season of new beginnings, gather us in, O God. We are the lost and forsaken, the blind and the lame. Gather us in, O God. We are the rich and the haughty, the proud and the strong. We are your sons, we are your daughters, longing for new life, yearning for your face. Gather us in, O God. We are in desperate need of your wine and water, your bread of new birth, the bread that is you.

In this season of new beginnings, help us to know that we all stand on holy ground. Help us to know that indeed we are holy ground. Help us to become more fully human. Awaken us to each other and the wonders of the world you have entrusted to us. Call to us now and hold us forever. Give us courage. Teach us to fashion lives that are holy and hearts that are true.

Here in this place and time—and in this season of new beginnings—may our kingdom come, may your will be done. Here in this place, may we continue to know your light, O God. This is our daily prayer. 🌿

Julie K. Aageson is coordinator of ELCA Resource Centers and director of the Resource Center for the Eastern North Dakota Synod. She is a member of Bethesda Lutheran Church in Moorhead, Minn.

* With thanks to Marty Haugen for the beautiful words from "Gather Us In," *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 532. Copyright © 1983 by GIA Publications, Inc., 7404 S. Mason Ave., Chicago, IL 60638 www.giamusic.com 800.442.1358 All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Lose a child to malaria? Not in this household.



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To most of us in the United States, mosquitoes are usually no more than a nuisance. But in many parts of Africa, a bite from an infected mosquito could transmit malaria and lead to death. Today we are in a special moment where we could turn this around. Working through Lutheran churches in Africa, the ELCA Malaria Campaign is uniquely positioned to provide mosquito nets, insecticides, medication, health care, education and more to eliminate deaths from this disease—for good.



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We've Got People

by Angie Shannon

“Who are your people?” The elders in the community would ask as they were getting to know each other in the smallish city of Gary, Ind. At that time, rarely did anyone ask about your occupation because the majority of African-Americans worked at the steel mills, as did my father prior to becoming a police officer.



Not “Who are you?” but “Who are your people?” was the question. Individuality took you only so far—the elders wanted to know how you were connected to others. The answer was important because it situated you in the community of people.

“Ooooooooooh, I know you! You are so-and-so’s baby sister.” “Really, your people came up from down South in the late 20s?!” Occasionally, in those exchanges, folks discovered they were distant cousins to everyone’s surprise and delight.

Some time ago, I watched with utter fascination two public television shows, “African-American Lives” and “Faces of America” by Dr. Henry “Skip” Gates of Harvard University. Through extensive genealogical research and DNA testing, he uncovered family histories that were once known only to God. Through his work, Dr. Gates asked “Who are your people?” People long for community and connection. These are among the heart’s deepest yearnings.

Community and connection: It is the stuff of comedies about family gatherings over Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners. It invigorates genealogists and gives them energy to spend endless hours in the library. Its undercurrent is acutely felt when Aunt Bessie calls you for a command performance at the family reunion. The very thought of being disconnected from community produces anxiety.

Think I am kidding? Try firming up the membership roster in your local congregation. Otherwise reasonable church members will have a meltdown when a pastor removes the name of a person no longer a part

of the worshipping community. It is irrational, to be sure. Because the stark truth is that it is more important that our names are found in the Lamb’s Book of Life than the parish directory.

Font connections

We find community and connection at the baptismal font, lake, creek, or any body of water. I never tire of Holy Baptism. Parents, sponsors, and families bring their infants to the font wearing baptismal gowns, some crisp and dazzlingly white, some with heirloom quality, formerly worn by grandparents and parents at their baptisms. Some babies and toddlers are giddy with peals of laughter, others are curious about the water, and still others wowl when the water touches them.

They come with hearts full of hope, presenting their children with the full assurance that they will enjoy a life in Christ in this one and the next. And there are those who, because of the daily witness of the saints and the example of the church, walk themselves to the font accompanied by their loved ones and sponsors. After I baptized an older executive-type, he said to me, “I am 60-plus years old, and this is the most important moment of my entire life, pastor.”

Whether your family and loved ones presented you as an infant or you walked yourself to the font, it was done out of a profound sense of community and connection to Christ.

Baptism names, claims, and confers salvation. It is not “fire insurance,” but rather it commissions us for a life of love and service as a child of God. It is not just *one more thing* to check off a laundry list of things to do for the child as a rite of initiation into the Christian church.

One day, a young woman called the church and inquired about baptism. “Ya’ll do baptisms there? I want to get my daughter baptized.”

“We sure do,” I answered, “And would you like fries with that?” The voice burst into laughter, then

grew quiet as I explained what love Christ has for her and her daughter, then invited her entire family to meet me at the church over coffee. They actually came! We spoke about how a community of faith enfolds the newly baptized to guide and nurture them in the way of Christian discipleship. It does not always happen, but her entire family joined the church as a result. The Christian life continues long after the baptismal gown, candle, and certificate have been packed away.

Disciples of Christ

What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ? Must one have a conversion experience? Does an encounter with the Living God call forth a dramatic response like dropping your fishing nets and following Christ? More often, God calls regular folks—living saints—who follow the call of Christ into the mission fields, soup kitchens, or wherever God may lead. Conversion is an act of God that involves daily dying and rising to the promises of that baptism.

Not many “cradle” Lutherans remember their actual baptisms. However, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* offers us prayers and rituals to recollect our baptisms as we gather for worship. I remember the day of my baptism very well.

I came to the Lutheran church by way of Liberty Baptist Church in my hometown of Gary, Ind. It started with an innocent enough question of a 7-year-old, “Why can’t I have communion?”

In the Baptist church I grew up in, the Lord’s Supper was shrouded in awe and holy mystery. Generally, communion was celebrated on the first Sunday of each month. Deacons, all male, would assist the pastor during the distribution. Reverently, they pulled white gloves on their hands as the pastor prepared the elements—tiny puffed crackers and grape juice. Deftly, the deacons handed the communion trays to the ushers and in turn, to the people. Each person took a cracker and a glass of grape juice and all waited until the pas-

tor instructed the assembly, “Take and eat and drink ye all of it.”

I was about seven when I became intensely curious about communion and wondered why children my age did not receive it. “Well, that’s because you are not baptized,” one of the older children informed me with a slight air of “nyah, nyah.” I asked my mother about baptism. Mama and Grandma gave each other the knowing look to indicate “it was time”—time to begin my baptismal instruction. Word had gotten around and people of the church began to pray for me in earnest.

I knew that if I was baptized, I could receive communion but I got the sense that it meant more than that so I asked as many questions. “How does baptism save me?” “If I was going to become a new creature, would I look any different?” “Why do we wear white gowns?” “There’s a lot of water in that pool, will I drown?”

Patient folks answered my questions with a sweet candor that I borrow today when I answer children’s questions of faith. Then one day, not long after I began to inquire about baptism, the pastor “opened the doors of the church.” Deacons assembled rickety wooden folding chair in front of the looming pulpit, the central fixture of the sanctuary. The pastor softened the tone of his “preaching voice” and offered a kind invitation to baptism. What else could I do? As if urged by the Holy Spirit, my little legs took me to one of those seats.

A church-lady type who also was the statistician announced to the pastor, “Miss Angela Shannon has presented herself as a candidate for baptism.” There were others too. Some presented themselves for membership by Christian experience, which was code for “I have been baptized.” She announced their names with the same decorum. It was properly moved and seconded by the trustee board to receive all of us. The church extended the right hand of fellowship: Those gathered got up and shook our hands as the choir sang “Leaning on the Ever-lasting Arms.” In the weeks that would follow, my mother and grandmother made

many preparations. There was a dinner to plan but more importantly, there was a Bible to purchase. My children's Bible would no longer do. My grandmother made the baptismal gown and the headdress I would wear on the big day.

Baptism at Liberty Baptist Church was no small undertaking. Right behind the choir loft was the baptismal font, which was a nice-sized wading pool, in front of a beautiful cross. Baptism Sunday came. My grandmother helped me into my baptismal clothing and led me to the stairs where the pastor waited for all who would be baptized that day. The congregation sang "Wade in the Water" and "Take Me to the Water."

As I ascended the stairs, I was so excited because I knew in my child's heart that things somehow would never be the same. As I got into the font with the pastor, he prayed over me invoking the Trinity and down I went, and in an instant, back up! That's correct. I was immersed! I find it amusing when Christians make comparisons regarding baptismal methods. If we believe the water (baptism) has no connection to the Word, then we are "all wet!"

A new community in Christ

After baptism, I put on a new dress. It was aquamarine with embroidered butterflies representing the waters from which I just emerged and the new life that I would live in Christ. It was that very day, that I received the Lord's Supper for the first time. I felt that I was a part of a "great banquet."

It was clear to me that I now belonged to a community much larger than I could imagine. Anyone who had ever been baptized was a new creature and a sister or brother to me in Christ. Talk about community and connection—these were pretty tall orders for a 7-year-

old! With the passage of many years, experiences, and even ordination, it is this understanding that continues to form and inform my calling as a child of God to word and service through baptism.

I learned from early age to look for Christ in others even if their behaviors make it difficult. And I pray



they would do the same for me. I walk and live in that identity daily.

The Savior answers the question, "Who are your people?" in ways that DNA evidence or genealogical research cannot. I belong to the family of God by water and Spirit. This sits me squarely in a community of faith to live, serve, and to love. And when this life is over, I will step from time into eternity and take my place in the community of the Church Triumphant. In Christ, *we've got people!* ☸

The Rev. Angie Shannon revels in the gift and promise of Holy Baptism. She is an ELCA pastor, writer, indulgent aunt, and pet mom to cats Hiram and Rudi.

Back in Jesus' Day

by Joy A. Schroeder



LIFE IN A PEASANT VILLAGE

Jesus' hometown, Nazareth, population 300, was a small village with narrow unpaved streets. People lived in tiny houses or dwelt in caves. Some 20 miles from Nazareth was Capernaum, a fishing town of about 1,000 residents on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. In these peasant villages, houses were made of uncut volcanic stones pieced together like a jigsaw puzzle. Villagers used mud as mortar, packed with straw for insulation. Unable to afford plaster, they covered the walls with mud (and sometimes dung) that hardened in the sun. Windows, if any, were located near

the ceiling, providing openings for light and ventilation—not an outside view. The doorway was an open space covered by a cloth or woven mat. Timber roofs were thatched and insulated with thick layers of straw and dried mud.

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus began his ministry in the towns, villages, and countryside of Galilee. What was daily life like for the first people to hear Jesus' message? What were their struggles, hopes, fears, and joys?

Usually an entire family shared a one-room house. They slept on mats, using wool blankets or cloaks for warmth during cold winter months. For nighttime light, people burned olive oil in a clay lamp with a wick. Because a poor family might have only one lamp for their home, Jesus' illustration about a lamp on a stand giving light to the whole house would have been a familiar image (Mark 4:21; Matthew 5:15).



During much of the year, life was centered in the walled courtyard of the home, where goats were penned and chickens roamed about. The courtyard served as both kitchen and family room. When they did not need to huddle inside due to rain or cold, families ate their meals there. Archeologists have found hooks for hanging lamps in the courtyard so that work and conversation could continue into the evening. Sometimes several homes, perhaps owned by members of an extended family, shared a courtyard. Households that could afford a cow, goat, or donkey might keep it inside the house at night for protection against weather and predators. At home, villagers inhaled the greasy smell of olive oil burning in lamps, the inviting aroma of bread baking in wood-burning or charcoal ovens, and the earthy scent of domestic animals.

Women used grinding stones to crush barleycorn into flour. Daily they baked bread in a small outdoor oven. Women's work included spinning wool with a spindle, weaving cloth on a loom, raising vegetables, picking wild herbs, repairing clothes, and tending children. Other work depended on the family livelihood,

such as picking grapes and olives, or drying fish. Fishing was a smelly, difficult vocation that involved catching, hauling, and sorting fish, as well as ongoing repair work on nets and boats. Twenty-five years ago, in the Sea of Galilee, archeologists recovered a first-century boat. Twenty-six feet long and six feet wide, it could hold a dozen occupants and was fitted for sailing and rowing. It was equipped with a lamp, for night fishing or evening work. Constructed from inferior wood, it also included parts salvaged from previous boats and showed evidence of repeated patching to fix leaks. The owner had gone to great effort keep the boat afloat on a tight budget.

Archeologists have not found evidence of any luxury items in Nazareth and Capernaum. By contrast, in Jerusalem (population 30,000) and Sepphoris (a city of 10,000, located four miles northwest of Nazareth), houses had red tile roofs and rectangular hewn stone walls. There, sewer systems ran beneath paved streets. In marketplaces, people could stroll in covered walkways supported by columns. Wealthy people owned imported goods such as glass vases. In their two-story

homes, plaster walls were painted to resemble marble. Women's hairpins and make-up applicators were carved from bone and ivory. Perhaps it was such wealthy cities Jesus had in mind when he spoke of privileged people who expected to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces (Mark 12:38–40).

DRIED FISH AND DAILY BREAD

Typical meals included flat, round barley pita bread. Wealthier people ate wheat bread, which cost twice as much. The poorest often had nothing but barley bread. Others could supplement their bread with vegetables, lentil stew, dates, figs, and olives. People used no silverware except knives and serving ladles. They spooned stew onto pita or used their bread to scoop food from a serving bowl. Goat and cow's milk was used for cheese and yogurt.

Meat was rarely eaten, but those who could afford it served goat, lamb, or mutton on special occasions. Archeologists have found virtually no pork bones in their excavations of Jewish towns. (Jewish dietary law forbids pork.)

Fish, which could be dried, pickled, or grilled (John 21:9), was more common than meat but was still too expensive for most people to eat regularly.

Dried fish could be carried easily without spoiling. Bread and fish are the most frequent items mentioned in the diet of Jesus and his followers (Mark 6:38; Mark 8:1–10). Beverages included beer, wine, and vinegar diluted with water. Drinking water came from wells, springs, lakes, seasonal streams, and rainwater collected in cisterns.

TAXES, COINS, AND DEBT

Jesus carried out his ministry at a time when life was changing. Farm families had been able to be self-sufficient, unless there were crop failures, drought, or locust infestations. They grew almost everything they needed, using their surplus to barter with others.

However when the Roman Empire occupied Galilee, it subjected the people to heavy taxation: between one-third and one-half their income. Even small towns like Capernaum had booths to collect taxes from farms and fishing businesses (Mark 2:14).

As family farms were sold to pay off tax debts, some families stayed on as tenants to work the land they had once owned, while others hired themselves out as day laborers. Jesus employed examples that reflected realities of first-century life: tenant farmers, heavy debts, and day laborers hoping for work (Mark 12:1–11; Luke 7:41–42; Matthew 20:1–16). Jesus used indebtedness as an image for sin, when he taught his disciples to pray, “Forgive us our debts” (Matthew 6:12).

Galileans understandably resented taxes imposed by Rome. They likewise resented their fellow Jews who earned their living collecting taxes on Rome's behalf. Taxation meant an increased need for coinage, as taxes were paid with money, not bartered goods.

Archeologists have found very few coins with images of people or animals in ancient Jewish settlements. Honoring God's commandment forbidding “graven images,” devout Jews wanted no such images on their coins. Pictures of Roman gods or emperors, portrayed as divine, were particularly offensive. Roman leaders minted currency without depictions of humans, gods, or animals for Jews to use. King Herod's coins had a helmet, star, and palm branches.

JEWISH IDENTITY AND TRADITIONS

In Judea and Galilee most people spoke Aramaic, a language related to Hebrew. Approximately 3 percent of the population could read. Though most were illiterate, they still knew and understood their scriptures and traditions, which they learned orally from teachers. Typical Jewish peasants learned about their faith by being taught in Aramaic.

Although Mark 1:39 says Jesus taught in synagogues throughout the region, archeologists have not

found any synagogue buildings in Galilee. *Synagogue* means *assembly*.

Most likely, in tiny villages too poor to construct a building solely for religious use, synagogue gatherings for teaching and prayers were held in courtyards or in the largest available home.

Larger cities could afford to build special buildings for religious gatherings. One such first-century synagogue, discovered in Gamla, north of Galilee, was a large rectangular hall with tiered benches along the walls, able to seat 150 people.

Whether people attended synagogue gatherings in a village courtyard or in an impressive building in a big city, they cared about preserving their traditions. In Jewish villages, towns, and cities, archeologists have found numerous storage vessels and kitchenware items made of chalky limestone.

Religious leaders taught that defilement would not be transmitted to stone like it could to ceramic or glass, which must be discarded if it came into contact with something considered unclean. Humans and some objects could be purified by immersing in a river, lake, or *mikveh* bath.

The *mikveh* (plural *mikvot*) was a pool dug into the ground, sealed with plaster, used to collect rain water. It contained steps so a person could descend into it and immerse. The *mikveh* was not for soaking but for ritual purification in preparation for certain activities, such as entering the temple. Someone who had menstruated, engaged in sexual relations, or touched corpses or unclean animals also needed to immerse.

For instance, people involved in fishing might touch unclean sea creatures, such as catfish, as they sorted fish. There were numerous *mikvot* near olive presses. This ensured that the olive oil was pure because it had been handled only by workers who had ritually bathed. Nowhere in the gospels does Jesus object to ritual bathing, but he criticizes those who accused his disciples of being lax in this spiritual practice (Mark 7:1–15).

HEALING AND WHOLENESS

First-century people suffered from many health problems. By examining bones, archeologists have learned that people's diets lacked sufficient iron and protein. Most did not live past their mid-thirties. Those who lived to old age usually suffered from severe arthritis. Crowds of people turned to Jesus for healing from fever, skin diseases, paralysis, seizures, blindness, hearing loss, withered limbs, and other afflictions. First-century doctors typically prescribed herbs, pharmaceutical remedies, and charms with prayers written on them. Mark 5:26 says that a woman with hemorrhages "had endured much under many physicians," spending all of her money but only growing worse.

Children were especially vulnerable. The sickness or death of a child was an all-too-familiar tragedy. In one-quarter of all childbirths, either the mother or baby—or both—perished. More than one-third of all children died before age five. Half of all people did not live to age 18.

Scripture includes poignant stories of desperate parents approaching Jesus seeking healing for their children. Jairus, a synagogue leader, begged Jesus to heal his 12-year-old daughter (Mark 5:22–23). A man sought Jesus' help for his son who suffered from convulsions (Mark 9:17–29). A Gentile woman turned to Jesus for healing for her daughter (Mark 7:24–30).

Jesus' ministry spoke to the deepest needs of everyday people. Gentiles and Jews alike came to Jesus for healing. He compassionately cured their sickness as a sign that God's reign was more powerful than any earthly powers and suffering. A loving God—not an oppressive emperor—ruled. Jesus' words and miracles offered the vision of a realm where the hungry would be fed, illness would be healed, debt would be forgiven, and all were welcome. ☙

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FAMILY MATTERS

Tough Questions

by Sue Gamelin

The front door closed, but I heard it open again. My daughter rushed back into the family room where I was having fun watching grandchildren Snow, 4, and Theo, 2, play with a castle made of cardboard boxes, duct tape, and plastic fruit. “I forgot to mention,” Jill said quietly into my ear, “don’t turn on the TV or talk about the day.” I had to think about what she meant as she hurried back out the door on the way to her teaching job. Then I realized the day’s date: September 11.

My daughter had some reason to worry that I might launch into a discussion of that tragic day with my grandchildren. I’m famous in our family for wanting to tackle tough subjects, even with kids. I hope that common sense would have kept me from initiating a dialogue about terrorism with a 4-year-old and a 2-year-old. But, at my age, I sometimes forget how young my grandchildren are. They seem to know so much.

But my daughter was right to warn me. After all, Jill grew up with me. She still talks with amazement—and sometimes with disapproval—about our Martin Luther King Jr. Day movies. When she and her older brother were young, I decided that MLK Day should be more than a day off of school. I wanted this day to be a time of learning about why this man was so important.

The first year I made this decision, a movie was playing that I thought would be good for our children to see. It was *Glory*, the extraordinary and difficult story of African American soldiers in

the Civil War. After the movie, we sat at McDonald’s and talked about it. And so began our tradition. One year we saw *Mississippi Burning*. Another year it was *Schindler’s List*. Our seemingly flakiest year was *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes*. That’s all we could find. Surprisingly, all three of us were wiping away tears when the credits rolled. We grieved Tarzan’s loss of freedom when he was captured and taken to “civilization,” which was so much less civilized than the jungle.

In retrospect, Jill says that she was a little young for some of my MLK Day movies. I honor her judgment. After all, she was the 10-year-old who was in tow. And so she was right to warn me about September 11 and discussing it with Snow and Theo. These are her precious children. I am the grandma. When my kids tell me what they want me to do about an important matter with their children, I honor that. There is a lovely component to my obedience to their wishes. When one of the grandchildren asks, “Why do we have to?” I reply, “Your mom, your dad, told me that you have to. They’re the bosses. I’m just the grandma.” Nice.

What is the right thing to do about those tough questions, when restrictions aren’t set? What do we do when the questions emerge, unbidden? One evening after her bath, Snow started talking about her mommy having been in my tummy. But then, she asked, “Where was she before she was in your tummy? Was she a thing? Or an idea?”

Children, even young ones, are exposed to the complex and difficult issues of life so young via TV, social media, and the discussions of adults right over their heads. They're living in the milieu of those issues.

When I asked the kids in Sunday school to list on the chalkboard the places where they see fighting, I was thinking that they would name Middle Eastern countries. Instead they wrote down, "At the park, in school, at home, on my bus."

When do we start to talk with the children in our lives about these tough questions? *How* do we do it? Do we initiate those conversations? Wait for them to come up?

How do we guard against being age-inappropriate? Do we encourage the questions about the *why* behind the what? Do we dare ask: "Where is God in all this?" What do we do when some of our family members don't want us to talk about God with their kids? How can we talk about the difficult issues of discrimination, war and peace, disease and death, God and suffering, when we're not sure of the answers ourselves?

I've figured out some of the answers to these questions, but I would love to hear from you about the decisions you've made. We can learn from each other.

Here are the guidelines I've set. I didn't have to set them all by myself. I have Jesus as my guide.

First of all, Jesus honored the questions posed to him. He took the questioner seriously. Pharisee, Canaanite woman, blind man, scribe, rich young ruler, disciple. When they asked, he listened intently before he answered. A second thing is this: When he listened, Jesus established a relationship with the questioner. When Bryce, 7, suddenly said, "Grandma, I forgot how Jesus died," I turned to him, put my arm around his shoulder, and began to answer. That leads to the next thing Jesus taught me. Jesus didn't run away from the questions. He answered each as would best serve the questioner.

I learned another thing from Jesus. He didn't force his understandings on the questioners. He didn't follow people as they left, demanding that they agree with him. He watched scribe and Pharisee plot against him, and the rich young ruler turn away sadly. He changed his mind as he debated with the Canaanite woman and he asked what the blind man wanted.

That doesn't mean Jesus wasn't afraid to challenge misunderstandings and lies. Peter found that out when the cock crowed. So, too, James and John with all that talk about drinking Jesus' cup. "He really got hurt," I said, when the kids in the Sunday school class thought that the crucifixion was God's magic and Jesus was okay

hanging there. "But remember what happened three days later? He was really alive! God did that."

The 10th anniversary of September 11, 2001, is upon us. Questions are bound to come up. Let's take the inquiries of the little ones around us seriously. Let's look into their minds and hearts, and try to see that day as it might seem to them. If their parents agree, let's talk with them in ways that reach 4-year-olds, 7-year-olds, and 13-year-olds appropriately, and not in ways that meet our own needs. Let's not be afraid to challenge misunderstandings or say that we don't know all the answers.

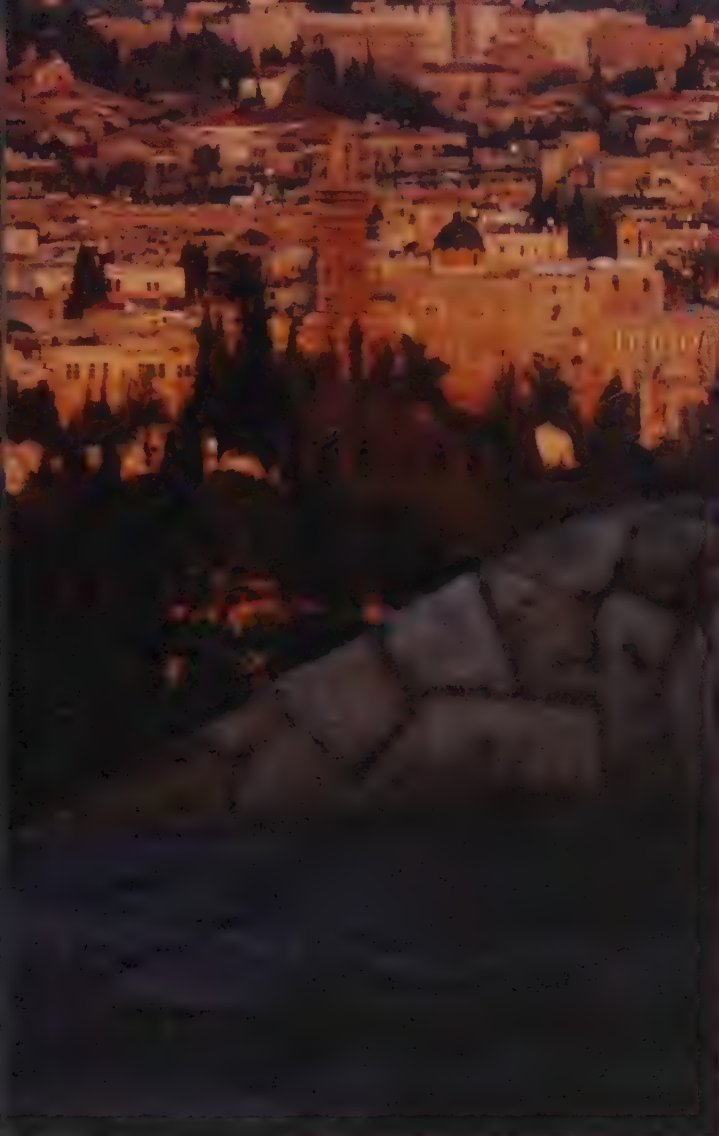
And let's bring God into the discussion. If their moms and dads worry about us doing that, let's be gentle with our words, and then tell the grown ups about the conversation. After all, children will hear about God in the park, on the bus, at school. What they hear about God in those places could be kind of goofy; let's give them the good stuff! We need to bring God into the midst of tough questions, because only God has all the answers.

September 11? September 11 hurt. But God was there and is here, in the middle of the pain, helping us heal. God does that. 🌿

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THOMAS WAS A DOUBTER. MATTHEW WAS A TAX COLLECTOR. JAMES AND JOHN WERE BROTHERS. SIMON PETER GOT WET. ANDREW WAS A FISHERMAN AND BROTHER. PHILIP AND BARTHOLOMEW DIDN'T TALK MUCH. JAMES AND THADDAEUS: QUIET AS WELL. THERE WAS ANOTHER SIMON AND THEN, OF COURSE, JUDAS, AND WE ALL KNOW WHAT HE STARTED.



I remember these 12 men, the disciples of Jesus, mostly because I had to take a quiz about them in confirmation class. It was important to know who followed Jesus—and not just the popular disciples, but even the under-rated ones. Knowing who was traveling with Jesus while he lived and loved on this earth was supposed to help me figure out how to be a faithful follower thousands of years later.

We had no confirmation quiz, however, on the names of the women that followed and served Jesus in the Gospel accounts. Perhaps it is because so many of these women were never given names, or they just showed up in the background: waiting on the hill as Jesus was crucified, attending to his body after it was

laid in a tomb, asking Jesus tough questions and refusing to leave without answers, washing his feet with their tears, anointing him before he died. These women and the stories of Jesus' interactions with them aren't always easy to come by in the Bible. Often we need to piece together several accounts to get a fuller picture of who they were. But their mysteriousness might just help them live on as we encounter little kernels of them in ourselves, our friends, and the companions on our own faith journeys.

Acknowledging the mysteries that surround some of these women, we begin to gather these stories as recorded in the Gospel of Mark.

Simon's mother-in-law

It wasn't that long ago that I found myself lying on my living room couch, sick as a dog, hoping that someone would spontaneously show up at my house with ginger ale and chicken noodle soup. Most of us have been victims of the flu at least once in our adult lives, and it is in this state that we find Simon's mother-in-law.

Jesus' fame has grown around the region of Galilee as he heals and teaches in the synagogue. Simon takes this healer to his home, where his mother-in-law suffers from a fever. She is the first woman we come into contact with in Mark's Gospel (29–34), the very first woman that Jesus touches and heals.

It takes only the touch of Jesus to raise Simon's mother-in-law up from her bed. It takes only the touch of Jesus to transform her from one who is sick into one who can serve. When Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law, suddenly her home becomes one of hospitality not just to Jesus and his disciples, but to the crowds that begin to bring their sick and broken friends and family to her doorstep.

We don't know her real name, but we do know that she responds to her healing by opening her home to heal others. She is the first to tell the story of the gospel through service to others.

Woman with a hemorrhage

We first meet this nameless woman as she stands on the sidelines of a crowd. Every day of her life for 12 years she suffered (Mark 5:24b–34). For 12 years she has tried all the cures, visited all the doctors, to no avail. She did not get better; instead she grew worse.

Twelve years was a long time to be sick, but not long enough for this nameless woman to give up. When any reasonable person might have quit hoping, she hears about Jesus and pushes her way through the multitude, reaches out her hand and grabs the cloak of the only one who could heal her. Immediately, she feels all that is broken inside her mend.

It might seem like just a healing story, but there is another miracle that bursts forth in this woman's life when she least expects it.

When he realizes who touched his cloak and the risks she took to do it, Jesus doesn't rebuke this woman, but calls her *daughter*: a name he calls no one else in the Gospel of Mark. There is power in that name.

Healing comes in many ways to the women who encounter Jesus. The woman with the hemorrhage dreamed of restored health. She never imagined that what Christ had in mind was a restored spirit.

The Syrophenician woman

One of the most troubling recorded encounters in the Gospels is Jesus' exchange with another unnamed woman, a Gentile, who requests healing for her daughter (Mark 7:24–30). Jesus, at first, refuses telling her that it is unfair to take the food of children and throw it to the dogs. But the child she loves is sick, and this woman refuses to take no for an answer. Telling Jesus that even the dogs receive scraps from the master's table, it is her spunk and love that refuse to accept his first answer.

She comes to Jesus as one unafraid, knowing that if he is the one all of creation has been waiting for she will not leave without his blessing.

The poor widow

Jesus and his disciples sit opposite the treasury of the temple and watch rich people put huge sums into the coffers (Mark 12:41–44). Behind this line of wealthy people stands a poor widow, with only two copper coins clutched in her fist. Holding nothing back, even when any onlooker would have given her a pass on that week's offering, she drops both of those coins into the treasury. She claims not her poverty, but her abundance. We call her "the poor widow," imagining her raggedy clothes and shuffling step. But in that very moment—when she gave everything she had to God—she is transformed, no longer defined by her lack of riches. In her generosity, we see her as a woman with abundant trust and faith in a God that is worth every risk we take.

The woman with the alabaster jar

Over and again, Jesus has predicted his death in Mark's Gospel. At best, his disciples don't understand what he is saying. At worst, they deny outright the truth of his imminent death. The more that Jesus heals and teaches, the more those in power plot to kill him.

Meanwhile, in Bethany at the house of a leper, a woman (again, with no name) comes to Jesus carrying an alabaster jar (Mark 14:3–8). She breaks the jar and anoints his head with oil, preparing him for a death he has foretold many times.

Her extravagance starts some murmurings around the table, as people (the disciples included) can't abide such a waste of precious perfume and money. But Jesus affirms her lavishness. Rather than scolding her, he rebukes her critics and names her as the one who will be remembered every time the good news is proclaimed in the world.

Mary Magdalene

She is the stuff of legend in our religious history. But in the Gospel of Mark, she doesn't show up until Jesus

has breathed his last (Mark 15:40–16:1–8). She stands with Salome and Mary, the mother of James, at the cross. We learn that these women followed Jesus and provided for him in his need. Together these women were the first to go to the tomb after the Sabbath to anoint Jesus' body; the first to encounter the angel who told them that Jesus was alive. Mary Magdalene was not a lonely follower of Jesus, but one who was in relationship with other women who believed that he was not only a prophet, but the son of God.

Like them

It is encouraging to see ourselves in these first followers of Jesus. When we doubt, it is reassuring to know that even Thomas wanted to see the wounds first-hand. When we're anxious and afraid, it helps to remind ourselves that even Peter sank into the waves when he stepped out of the boat to meet Jesus walking on the water. It gives us hope to imagine that even those who spent their days in the physical presence of their teacher and friend were confused and frightened on the evening of Good Friday and wondered if the reports of resurrection were just wishful thinking.

If we think that women only started to have a role as leaders in the faith once the church entered the modern era, we ignore those women who served before us. As Jesus walked on this earth, faithful women loved and served him. They were healed, they stood by him, they prepared him for death, they told the story of the resurrection even when no one was ready to believe.

We can also see ourselves in the lives of the faithful who sit next to us in the pew. As we accompany one

another on our journey of faith, we know of men and women who have cut paths for us in the hard and wild places. They serve as our guides and mentors on this faithful journey.

Faithful disciples are found not just in the Gospel stories, but in the lives of those who serve coffee on Sundays and offer hospitality, like Simon's mother-in-

law. Faithful disciples are found every time a woman acts as a nurturing mother, sister, and friend to one who is alone and afraid, like the woman with the hemorrhage. They are found when women stand up for the poor and marginalized, no matter what the risk, like the Syro-phenician woman. They are found when women refuse to be defined by what they lack, and instead claim the gift of generosity and trust, like the poor widow at the temple. They are found when women carefully prepare the space for worship, like the woman with the alabas-

ter jar. They are found when women stand together and witness to the power of relationships founded in a God who loves all of creation and surrounds all of us in a circle of care.

Their stories may lack details (and sometimes even names), and they might be a mystery, but the character of these women live on in our relationships and in our lives. It is in their stories, told in Scripture and echoed in our community now, that we get a more complete vision of God's kingdom. What a gift it is to know that God has been using women since the beginning—even if they don't show up on the confirmation quizzes! 🌿

The Rev. Brooke Petersen serves as pastor at Irving Park Lutheran Church in Chicago.



Mary Magdalene by Br. Robert Lentz, OFM
Courtesy of Trinity Stores (www.trinitystores.com)

DEALING WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

Journey to Healing

by Carol Schickel



THE changing seasons bring adjustments to our routine. In the fall we add a sweater before we walk out the door; we turn headlights on the car for the drive home from work; or we put our garden to rest, preparing the ground for winter. For many of us this feels like a rhythm that is normal, good, and predictable. It provides us with a sense that life moves along.

But, for some, such times bring unwelcome changes. The autumn can be a difficult time for many as daylight hours decrease and people are reminded of their losses. Emotions, unconscious but troubling, are unleashed, and as they rise to the surface, the symptoms can be painful and disruptive.

Catie was discouraged. When she completed college in three years, she felt focused and driven. But now that she was settled in her career, she had lost passion for her work in healthcare. She was weary from chronic back and neck pain that had not responded to physical therapy. And after her parents divorced, her relationship with her father deteriorated. She felt like he pressured her about everything. Meanwhile, Catie ended a long-term relationship after realizing it was going nowhere. Her comment was "I've always been somebody else's something." The recurring thought that she does not fit in had returned, and she was tired, irritable, and beginning to feel anxious and desperate. Catie stopped going to church ... what was the point anyway? She had tried vitamin therapy and made changes in her diet. She was wondering where to turn and particularly concerned about what on earth was wrong with her. Why was she feeling this way?

The signs of emotional distress can vary, but we can recognize depression as it weighs down on us or someone we know. The darkness of it can block out any hope for the person who is suffering. Often, those with depression want to withdraw; they imagine that no one cares or can help, and that is a lonely and desperate state.

We value the balance of emotional wellness. A strong and sturdy outlook gives us the freedom to live a more joy-filled, contented life. Yet many of us (likely most of us) at one time or another experience grief,

loss, sadness, and other dark emotions that are a burden to us or someone we know. Psalm 88 describes this as in "the depths of the Pit," "like those forsaken."

Mental health disorders are common in the United States. In a given year approximately one quarter of adults are diagnosable for one or more disorders and 13 percent receive some sort of treatment for a mental health problem. The most serious and debilitating mental illnesses are concentrated among a much smaller population (about 6 percent, or 1 in 17). There are many types of mental illnesses, such as mood disorders (including major depressive disorder, dysthymic disorder, and bipolar disorder) anxiety, autism, eating

disorders, personality disorders, dissociative identity disorder, and schizophrenia. Treatment might include inpatient or outpatient care and/or prescription medications for mental or emotional problems (source: National Institute of Mental Health).

STIGMA We've read it in the news—a celebrity is taking time off from public life to cope with bipolar disorder. A prominent figure has entered a treatment program to deal with emotional upheaval in her life. Someone in your congrega-

tion tells you she has been diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder and is a survivor of sexual abuse. Increasingly, people are courageous in claiming their reality and seeking appropriate help. Yet the stigma of mental illness in today's society keeps many people silenced. Emotional distress threatens careers and family stability, often leading to addiction and other destructive behaviors. And it can tragically lead to disrupted lives, hidden brokenness—and even suicide. As our culture emphasizes competition and success,

the pressure grows to compare one's self to others. We can't begin to meet the ideal that the media projects for health or beauty or success, and we may find ourselves under stress of financial worries, family crisis, or issues that undermine self-confidence. This can lead to shame and anxiety.

And those who suffer emotional distress may become isolated and withdrawn from the life-giving experiences of human community. So the nourishing and sustaining value of relationship is lost as a person spirals down into her own private chaos of mental

know what to say, or we worry that we won't find the right words or know enough to be helpful.

Like those in the Gospel of Mark who saw Jesus healing the lepers and those possessed by demons, we might say "he has gone out of his mind" or "he has an unclean spirit." In biblical times there were various diseases that were stigmatized. People were banished or avoided or pitied.

We have the opportunity to challenge this stigma in our culture and to liberate those who need help, providing support sooner and more effectively. We can bring mental illness out of the shadows of shame and weakness. We can correct the misinformation that gets perpetuated and begin to advocate for those who suffer.

Melissa, a pastor's wife, is seeing a pastoral psychotherapist and recently began taking an antidepressant prescribed by her doctor. Melissa had been feeling isolated by her depression, so she called her friend Mary to share the sense of hope that returned after so many months of despair. Mary warned her that she is just covering up her problems with medicine and advised her to turn to prayer, even offering her own prayer over the phone. Melissa was disappointed and confused by this reaction. She just wanted to feel safe sharing this part of her life with a friend. Mary's reaction made her more cautious about talking to her religious friends and acquaintances. Melissa feels that in sharing some of her own struggle, others might be helped in some way. And she is uncomfortable with her husband, Jeff's, opinion that depression is a disease that labels her. He doesn't want her to talk about it. While Jeff fears that people would gossip or think badly of her, Melissa believes expressing her thoughts is a way to normalize what other women experience.

illness—whatever the cause—and becomes disconnected from the lifeline of others' support.

It's true: We can be very uncomfortable when we are around a so-called "crazy person," someone who is depressed or experiencing anxiety. And what about a child with autism, or ADHD, or another emotional illness? It can be a real stretch to respond kindly. We might feel embarrassed or find ourselves feeling critical of someone who is perceived as weak. And so our first response might be silence. Few of us are comfortable talking with someone about such problems. We don't

know what to say, or we worry that we won't find the right words or know enough to be helpful.

symptoms. Medication breakthroughs have continued to bring new treatments for symptoms related to mental illness, including bipolar disorder, depression, and schizophrenia.

Psychotherapy and pastoral counseling are healing experiences for many people. A therapist can listen to someone's suffering and attempt to contain the distress that is present in a person's mind, body, and soul. Therapy can offer a person the experience of expressing her emotions and have a tempering effect on the disruptive feelings that are trapped inside.

HOPE AND HELP Health is a gift from God. Our disease—as well as our healing—affects the routine and practices of our lives, grounded in our relationship with God. We seek resources to restore our lives and develop resilience for life's inevitable challenges and stresses. Today we are accustomed to a wide assortment of medicines and therapies to address our complaints and

Friends and family members are vital to healing for someone living with an emotional illness. You can name the symptoms you observe without denying or minimizing a person's value. Speak the truth, rather than offering wishful thinking or remaining silent. Be an informed observer: Read and learn about the mental illness that impacts someone you know. And be sure to care for yourself, so your own strength can be useful.

The path toward wellness requires a safe space for personal truth and the steady support of those who care. We can offer a lifeline just by being present—often that's really the best we can offer to a friend or family member living with mental illness. We don't think of emotional illness as a gift. But it can be when a person looks back on a time of dark emotions or mental illness and realizes how God was present. The healing journey is best done in the company of others.

Recognize the deep mystery of God and trust it will be discovered in this journey. Offer your support, but refrain from religious or scientific explanations. You might seek to practice *empathic attunement* by being present to the pain or distress of mental illness. You can ask sensitive questions, not just out of curiosity, but because you really want to understand. You don't need to fix anything. Focus on being sensitive to what it's like for your loved one to feel the way she does. Seek to be that person who is a safe and relaxing presence, able to share the weight of the burdens.

PRACTICAL TIPS TO HELP

You might consider:

- > A morning phone call to just say hello.
- > An invitation to share a meal.
- > A ride to and from church.
- > An act of kindness that reflects the message "I care."



PREVENTION AND WELLNESS We know from research that some people are predisposed to develop various types of mental illness. We all can benefit from seeking a healthy lifestyle to manage our lives more effectively and defend against the emergence of symptoms. Some suggestions for spiritual, physical, social, and emotional wellness include:

Spiritual

- Pray, meditate, worship, read.
- Practice forgiveness—over and over again.
- Reconcile your relationships.
- Nurture a positive attitude about life.
- Let go of guilt and shame in light of God's unconditional acceptance.

Physical

- Engage in physical activity as a natural mood elevator.
- Get out and walk...appreciate your surroundings.
- Join an exercise class...yoga, tai chi, pilates or something that's fun.

Social

- Stay active and involved in nourishing relationships.
- Belong to something bigger than yourself.
- Talk to someone when you feel "off."
- Get creative—do a craft or write or sing.

When a person walks through a dark valley, she may discover that she is not alone. God's grace is revealed—and most of the time it's through the caring presence of another human being. You might represent God in that way. Will you be that woman? 🌿

Carol Schickel is a psychotherapist and a rostered associate in ministry of the ELCA. She lives in Chicago with her husband, Rob. They have two grown children and five precious grandchildren: Julia, Joshua, Henry, Noah, and Edward.



HEALTH WISE

Walking Wonders

by Molly M. Ginty

For Karen Stuart, big change came one step at a time.

"When I started walking for exercise eight years ago, weight started melting off me and I lost a total of 30 pounds," says Stuart, a business consultant in Denver. "That inspired me to help create walking trails and groups in my community. And now, thanks to daily strolls I take alone or with friends, I'm 60 years old, the same size I was in my 40s, and feel like I'm bursting with energy."

One of the easiest and cheapest ways to work out, walking burns 100 calories per mile. And whittling your waistline and boosting your mood are just the beginning of its benefits.

Research shows walking can lower your risk of back pain, depression, dementia, diabetes, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, strokes, and cancer. One study found strolling 30 minutes a day for five days a week—doing a tenth as much walk-

ing as Stuart does—is enough to prolong your lifespan.

Walking's benefits have been known since the time of Hippocrates, the 4th-century B.C. Greek physician who said, "You have two doctors: your left leg and your right." But Americans walk about half as much as people in other industrialized countries—and far less than the ideal daily total of 10,000 steps (five miles or 100 to 150 minutes) that authorities recommend. "Not only are most of us not walking enough, but we're also not walking correctly," says Pamela Peeke, MD, the Baltimore-based author of *Body for Life for Women*. "We need to improve our form so we can move more efficiently, burn more calories, and build up the strength that we need."

Considering a stroll through the September sunshine? Before you lace up your sneakers and go, here are 10 top tips for getting your stride right.



This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org for more information.

Add steps with every step

"When I first started measuring how much I walked, I was surprised that I logged just 3,000 steps per day even though I considered myself fairly active," says Stuart. "I eventually reached 10,000 steps by making small changes such as using the stairs instead of the elevator, parking my car at the far end of the lot, and wearing a pedometer to chart my daily progress."

Feet first

Choose walking or running shoes that have arch support, a firm heel, and thick, flexible soles to absorb shock. Because feet tend to swell when you're pounding the pavement (or tackling the trails or the treadmill), consider buying shoes a half to a full size larger than normal.

Suit up

Wear loose, breathable layers so you can move with ease, so perspiration wicks away from your skin, and so you can remove or add clothing to adjust to changing temperatures. A fanny pack with a bottle holder can help you stay hydrated and keep your arms swinging free. Bright or reflective colors can boost your safety because they help motorists see you on the road.

Ease in and out

At the start and end of every stroll, spend five minutes warming up

your muscles and five minutes cooling your body down. Prevent injuries by beginning and finishing with leg and side stretches (found at <http://tinyurl.com/winwalking>).

Align right

"Keep your shoulders relaxed and your arms hanging loose, with your hands open and your elbows bent at 90-degree angles," says Peeke. "At the same time, keep your neck long, your eyes level, your stomach pulled in, and your buttocks engaged."

The correct positioning will help you work your core muscles more effectively—and burn more calories.

Buddy up

"When I took up walking in 2009, my best friend Tracy strolled with me," says Gail Henderson, 53, a Blue Cross Blue Shield insurance administrator in Gonzales, La. "On days when we were tired or lazy or thought we couldn't find time, we motivated each other." Having support from a friend (and from her company, which encourages employees to exercise) helped Henderson control her asthma, lower her blood pressure, and shed 70 pounds.

Fetch Fido

A study found dog owners are 69 percent more likely than others to get physical activity—no surprise to Stuart and her golden retriever, who walks with her nearly every day.

Build slowly and steadily

Whether your schedule allows you a long midday walk or two shorter strolls in the morning and evening, it's best to ease into your routine. For beginners, Peeke recommends daily strolls for a total of 10 to 15 minutes (about half a mile).

By increasing your distance 5 to 10 percent per week—and doing so with your doctor's blessing—you may eventually work up to 10,000 steps—or more.

Mix it up

Add intensity and keep your regime interesting, hike up hills or experiment with speed intervals: hoofing it as quickly as you can, sauntering slowly, then speeding up again.

Stroll for charity

Walking can not only be a big boon to your own health, but can help you raise money for many medical conditions such as AIDS or Alzheimer's or breast cancer.

Some walks (such as the three-mile Komen Race for the Cure, <http://ww5.komen.org>) are appropriate for beginners, while others (such as the 26- to 39-mile Avon Walk for Breast Cancer, www.avonwalk.org) require six months of training. 🌿

Molly M. Ginty (<http://mollymaureenginty.wordpress.com>) lives in New York City. Her work has appeared in *Women's eNews*, *Marie Claire*, *Redbook*, and *Ms*.



WE RECOMMEND

Resources for action, advocacy, programs, or further study

Compiled from sources including the ELCA News Service, Seeds for the Parish, and www.elca.org

Try knitting as a spiritual practice

One of the newest additions to Women of the ELCA's free online resources is "Knitting as a Spiritual Practice." Knitting, once a grandmotherly craft, has been rediscovered. New generations of women are toting their knitting bags around, making scarves, hats and prayer shawls. Knitting has also emerged as a spiritual practice that opens a way to meditation. Understand the connection between craft and spirituality with his simple scarf project that will help you practice deliberate focus and meet the Divine as you work. Download your free copy at <http://tinyurl.com/spiritualknitting>. For other free Women of the ELCA resources, visit our Web site at www.womenoftheelca.org.

Download Women of the ELCA's new iPod app

Daily Grace is an on-the-go companion for your journey, offering a faith reflection every day. In these brief writings you'll encounter God's extravagant, boundless, and often surprising grace. You will be comforted, challenged, inspired, consoled, and confronted. The daily reflection will stir you to live out your baptismal calling. Take time to reflect, offer a prayer and prepare for the day. Read the daily message or choose Random Grace. Learn how to download the app at www.womenoftheelca.org.

Living well in this life

Sister Joan Chittister's newest book, *The Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to a Meaningful Life* (BlueBridge, 2011), is

her guide on living a meaningful spiritual life in today's world.

"The search for God is an eternal one," Chittister writes in the book's introduction. "It plagues every generation. It stalks every soul. It is the insistent, eternal cry for meaning, for answers to the questions."

A Benedictine nun, author, and speaker, Chittister follows the Rule of Benedict, and her new spiritual guide is rooted in that Rule. She writes: "For Benedict of Nursia (a sixth-century founder of communal monasticism), the spiritual life lay in simply living *this* life, our *daily* life, well. All of it. Every simple, single action of it."

The book shows readers new ways of meaningful living in the center of their own world—without withdrawing from it. Pick it up at your local bookstore or online at www.amazon.com.

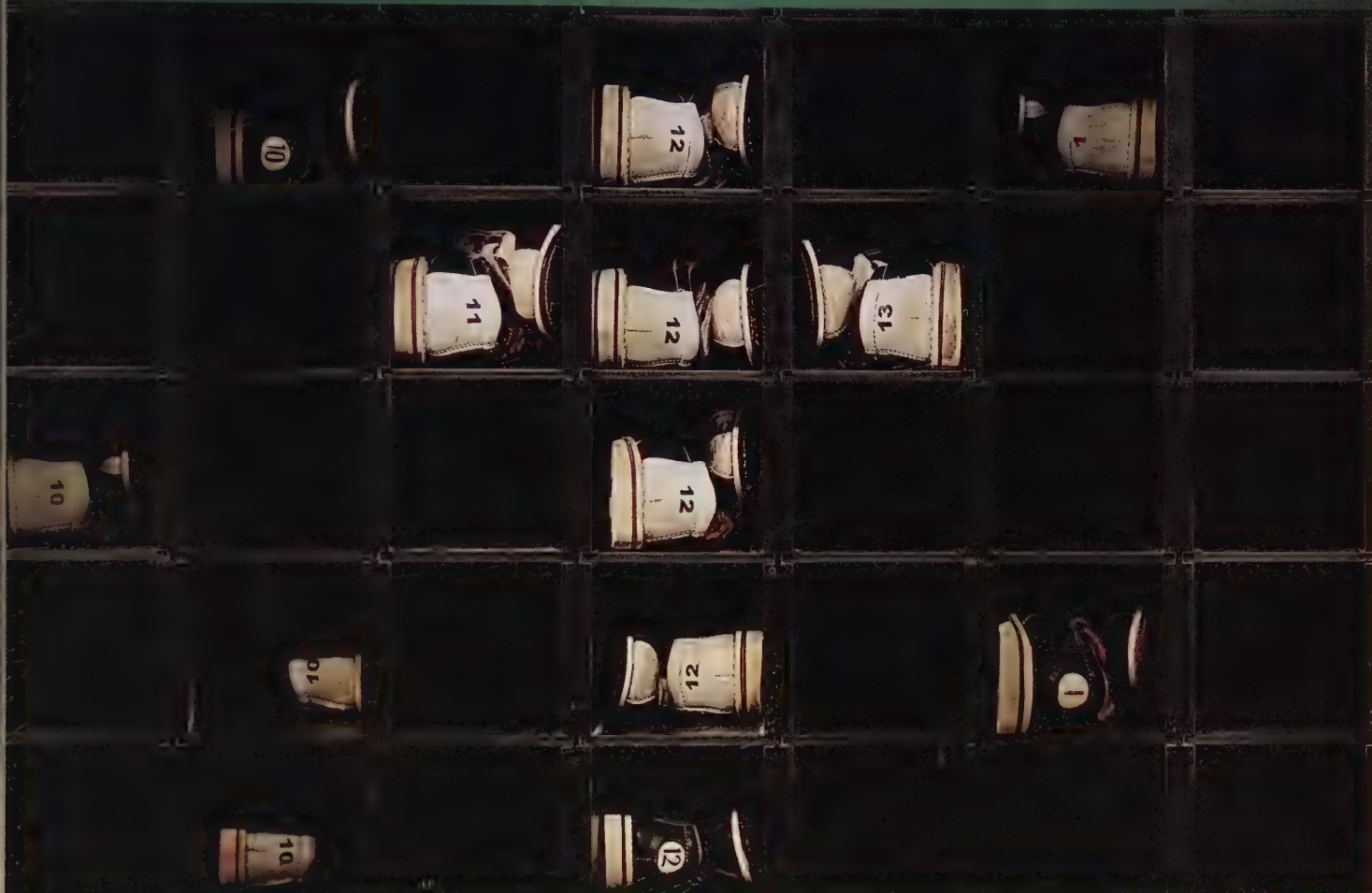
AARP Health Tools

The AARP Web site offers health tools that address questions about Medicare, drug interactions, and where to find cheaper medicines. There is a Doughnut Hole Calculator for those with Medicare Part D who are worried about a coverage gap. The Pill Identifier tool helps people avoid medication mix-ups, by allowing for searches by imprint, shape, or color of the medicine.

The Drug Interaction Checker allows you to choose from a list of common drugs or type in the name of a drug. AARP Health Tools is at www.aarp.org/health/health_tools/.

IT TAKES A SPECIAL INVESTMENT
TO TURN A BOWLING ALLEY INTO

A SANCTUARY.



March 18, 2009.

Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church, Orlando, Florida.

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BIBLE STUDY

JESUS OF NAZARETH

by Patricia Lull

Theme Verse

*"The time is fulfilled,
and the kingdom of God
has come near, repent and
believe in the good news."
Mark 1:15*

Opening

Hymn "On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry" (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 249, verses 1, 2, and 4)

Prayer

Gracious Spirit, open our lives to hear your living voice in these words of Mark's Gospel. Help us to listen with patience, to speak with wisdom, and to grow in understanding. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Amen.

Introduction to Mark 1:1–45

When I was a child, my family often spent Sunday afternoons riding in the car, visiting relatives out in the country. That was back in the days when two or three adults and a few children could all squeeze into the family sedan. The countryside included farmland and small towns in northwestern Ohio, where I grew up. Mercifully, these afternoon adventures often ended at an ice-cream stand.

I was the youngest child in my family, which meant I always rode in the backseat, getting the window seat only when an older sibling granted this privilege. My memory of these

rides includes a cascade of changing landscapes and a litany of questions from the backseat. "Where are we going?" "Are we there yet?" "Who are these people?" "Why are we stopping here?"

From the front seat, my parents' answers often expanded to include stories of life in earlier decades, chronicles of our family's history, and commentary on the changes that had occurred in the world I grew up in. Sometimes, questions also echoed from the front seat. "Don't you remember when we came here last year?" "What are the names of your great-grandmothers whose graves we are going to visit?" "What would you have done if you had lived here in pioneer days?"

And always, before we exited the car to knock on a relative's door, our mother would remind us how we were to behave. "Sit still and listen. Remember, these are people who have known and loved you before you were even born."

Beginning a year-long study of the Gospel of Mark is something akin to embarking on an extended ride through the biblical landscape

and culture in which the Gospel writer unfolds the story of Jesus for those who are ready to discover the God who has known and loved us long before we were even born.

Some of you have traveled this way before and will likely claim seats up front, helping to navigate the route, offering crucial insights as others discover the beauty and power of these texts for the first time. Others may be riding in the backseat, wondering what role you will get to play in this shared encounter with an ancient text.

On this journey from Jesus' baptism to his resurrection, there is an important place for the insights of experienced Christians and the fresh questions of those who are reading the Gospel of Mark perhaps for the very first time. Each of the nine sessions is built around questions that are asked in Mark's text, as well as questions participants bring to the text.

You may recognize this question-and-answer format from catechism. It is a pattern Christians have used for centuries to pass on the basics of the faith and guidelines for Christian living from one generation to the next. Asking questions and rehearsing the answers is also how families and communities pass on the stories that reveal their true identity and values.

Each session will begin with an introduction to the main themes for the month, a hymn and prayer to orient the group. Whether you do the concise, the full, or the extended version of the lesson as outlined in the Leader Guide, you will have an opportunity to know the joy that comes from reading the Bible with others.

Behind the Written Text

As contemporary readers, we bring some standard questions to everything we read. Whether we are browsing at the fiction table in a bookstore or scanning articles on a popular Web site, we have learned to ask questions like these: Who wrote this? When and where was it written? What is this author's perspective

on life? How does this text relate to other things I have read? What will I gain by reading this?

Those are all good questions to have in mind as we begin a new Bible study on the Gospel of Mark, but they are not necessarily the most helpful questions for getting launched on our nine-month journey together. Consider, instead, the way the Gospel opens. "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1).

In Greek, the original language for this book of the Bible, the word for *good news* or *gospel* is *euangelion*. Mark begins with a unique and powerful declaration that the very text of the book itself is a message of good news about the one called Jesus. While we call the first four books of the New Testament *Gospels*, only Mark claims that designation for itself.

Recognizing that the book we are reading is a Gospel invites us to embark on this study as a theological journey—a trip of mutual discovery into a text that was meant from the start to be a holy word. Whatever else we might conclude about the origin and authorship of this text, we will want to remember that in its form and purpose we are given an opportunity to encounter the living God.

All the same, as readers, we are curious. When, where, and why might this narrative have been written down? Over the centuries church scholars have had a variety of ideas about the origin of this text. The earliest of those considers Mark to have been written by an associate of St. Peter, perhaps in Rome, around the year 70 A.D. Most scholars think that Mark was the first Gospel to be written and that it likely served as a model for Matthew and Luke.

Mark introduces us to Jesus through a unique and innovative kind of narrative. Mark is not exactly a biography in the modern sense, with sources acknowledged and footnoted and various perspectives on a life included. But Mark is a coherent account of a life that contains crucial things that were said or done by Jesus as remem-

bered by those who had seen and heard him. Above all, a gospel is a theological commentary on who this Jesus of Nazareth is through the eyes of faith and what difference Jesus makes for our lives and for the world.

This innovative style of narrating the meaning of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection focuses attention on the theological significance of Jesus not just as a historically interesting figure but as the Son of God, as stated in the first verse and affirmed by the centurion at the cross in Mark 15:39.

Themes and Echoes

Several prominent themes shape the pacing and movement of the overall story. These include: the identity of Jesus as the Christ, the meaning of discipleship, the coming kingdom of God, the tension between knowing and not knowing who Jesus is, hope in the sure promises of God, and the surprise of the resurrection. While each of these themes will be explored in greater detail as they appear in the Gospel narrative, they also provide clues as we try to imagine just who the first readers of this written text were and how they responded.

The first generation of Christians knew who Jesus was through the eye-witness testimony of those who encountered him during his earthly life. Scholars think that the next generation came to encounter Christ through a more tailored and standardized testimony or tradition passed orally from one community of faith to another. By the third generation, as the Christian witness spread geographically, a written account became necessary, even imperative, to carry forth this testimony to the good news.

Imagine questions such as these: Who is this Jesus? What does it mean to follow him? How does God's will affect our lives today? Why doesn't everyone turn and follow this Christ? What does Jesus' resurrection from the dead mean for us today? Those were questions of the faithful in the year 211 as much as they are our questions for many in 2011.

1. What questions do you bring to this Bible study of Mark's Gospel? List them.

Beginning with Baptism

READ MARK 1:1–11.

The announcement of life-changing good news begins to take shape with the initial appearance of Jesus, not as a baby, but as a young adult. Mark's theological narrative introduces Jesus when he steps feet-first into a remarkable story that begins first with the Old Testament prophets and then with the striking figure of John the Baptist, the last of a long line of such figures.

Mark introduces us to the good news of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, by quoting the prophets Isaiah (Isaiah 40:3) and Malachi (Malachi 3:1) in the second and third verses of his Gospel. Mark suggests that the identity of this one called Jesus is rooted in promises made at a much earlier time in God's history with Israel. The messenger or announcement-bearer of this good news is now John the Baptist or John the Baptizer. For John, baptism was a ritual washing meant to signify repentance, a person's desire to live in a new way and to draw close to God's will.

But this is not the only Old Testament clue in these first verses. John is described as dwelling in the wilderness and being clothed in an odd and distinctive way. These clues are meant to trigger a memory of other Old Testament prophets, especially Elijah (1 Kings 17) and Elisha (1 Kings 19). Mark suggests that the crowds that came out to the Jordan River to see and hear John were already primed for a religious encounter that would turn their old way of living on its head.

But notice that John directs attention away from himself and toward someone more powerful who is about to appear. That someone is this man named Jesus of Nazareth. The rest of Mark's Gospel will help us understand who this man is and why he has come in that time and at that place. What happens next is a signal to Jesus about the very nature of his identity, for as he came up

from the waters of John's baptism, he saw heaven "torn apart" and the Spirit descending on him in the form of a dove, and God's voice pronouncing him as the son, the beloved. We will hear very similar language about heaven being torn apart when we come to the crucifixion in Mark 15:38. Between now and then, Mark wants us to know that Jesus is God's beloved son and that God is pleased with who Jesus is.

For Christians, the baptism of a baby or an adult resonates with similar themes of identity, naming, and God's blessing on the life of the one who is baptized. Before diving more deeply into this text, pause to share a brief story about your own baptism. (See "We've Got People," p. 12.)

2. What do you know about your own baptism? Who else was there? How did it mark the beginning of your own story with God?

From Jordan to Galilee

READ MARK 1:12–15.

A sense of urgency runs throughout Mark's telling of this Gospel story. The word *immediately* enters in verse 12 to describe the abrupt way that Jesus' baptism in the Jordan Valley leads to a time of profound testing in the wilderness by Satan. *Immediately* appears in several forms 17 times in this Gospel. Mark focuses our attention to the next important thing even before we have fully digested the significance of the baptismal scene.

Jesus has come to call others to repentance and forgiveness, but before that ministry begins he will endure his own time of being tested.

Mark does not try to describe what happened during those 40 days, but again we are given clues from other stories in the Old Testament when the people of Israel and various prophets wrestled with their identity and trust in God for a period of 40 days or 40 years, often in the wilderness.

Jesus is, however, not alone. The wild beasts are there, and, at the end of the ordeal, the angels wait on

him, suggesting that they fed him.

This is also a time of profound theological transition, as our attention shifts from the prophet John the Baptist to Jesus the Messiah. Both men invited people to turn again to God, but from Jesus there is a new message about the completion or fulfillment of God's plans. This is another clue that promises from the Old Testament are now being lived out in a fresh and life-changing way. Notice that Jesus invites people to repent and believe in the *good news*, the *euaggelion*, the *gospel* of this new era. This is not something we do only with our heads; this claims our whole life.

Following and Serving

READ MARK 1:16–31.

Already in chapter one, Mark gives examples of what it means to catch on immediately to who Jesus is and the message he is preaching. In these 15 verses, four fishermen leave their old way of life to follow Jesus as disciples, demonic spirits recognize Jesus for who he really is, and Simon's mother-in-law rises from her sickbed after Jesus heals her. And she waits on him as the angels did in the wilderness just a few verses back.

Each story is more than just an illustration. Each encounter introduces a significant theme that will thread throughout the Gospel. Jesus' profound call is "come and follow" as a disciple. Some will accept the call and others will reject it throughout the book.

To learn from such witnesses, watch for how disciples, including "the 12," behave. But also be attentive to other examples of men and women who respond to Jesus' power as a teacher and healer by taking up his way of life. How many will you discover in Mark's Gospel? You may want to keep a running tally like on the chart on the next page.

Disciples of Jesus

3. What does it mean to you to be a disciple? Is this an identity you have claimed your whole life or did a particular experience

Disciples of Jesus

BIBLICAL PASSAGE	NAME OF DISCIPLE	DESCRIPTION OF DISCIPLE
Mark 1:16	Simon or Peter	Fisherman; leaves nets to follow
Mark 1:16	Andrew	Fisherman, brother of Peter; leaves nets
Mark 1:19	James	Son of Zebedee, leaves boat and nets
Mark 1:19	John	Son of Zebedee, brother of James; leaves boat and nets

lead you to this identity? Why is discipleship still important in the 21st Century?

In Mark 1:23–27 a man cries out while Jesus is teaching in the synagogue. This was likely as unsettling in Jesus’ day as it would be in the midst of a formal worship service today. Yet this disruption allows Mark to set an important matter before us. “What have you to do with us Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?” the troubling spirits in the man cry out. Yes, Jesus has come to destroy them, because he is, as the evil spirits shout, the “Holy One of God.”

When Mark was writing his Gospel, both physical and mental illnesses were understood differently than we understand them today. Yet, our medical and mental health views parallel Mark in recognizing that God wills all creation to be whole and well. Notice that Jesus honors the man who calls out to him and heals him on the spot.

This exorcism or healing is followed by a story of discipleship that is easily overlooked but points to the important role of women disciples in Mark.

We can imagine Jesus and the first four disciples retiring to Simon’s house after the commotion in the synagogue. Simon’s mother-in-law is herself ill in bed.

Jesus tends to her needs, heals her, and she in turn rises to serve the group as a good host. Watch throughout this Gospel for the way that women appear as disciples, whether they bear that title or not (See “Women of Mystery,” p. 22).

4. Who are some of the women who have modeled Christian living for you? What was it about their way of life that made them a living witness and disciple?

The story continues at a fast pace. People press in on Jesus, desiring the gift of healing. His reputation spreads quickly; too quickly in the sense that he silences the demons (1:34) because they are “on” to him and who he really is. His command over demons and illness cannot be hidden. (If time allows, read Mark 1:32–39.)

The Secret’s Out

READ MARK 1:40–45.

Here is a glimpse of Jesus’ tender mercy being extended to a man with leprosy. In ancient times such skin diseases turned a person into an outcast who was no longer allowed to live within the community. While we understand diseases from a very different perspective today, people with certain diseases still bear a stigma

that makes it difficult for them to enjoy life with their family and neighbors. (See "Journey to Healing," p. 26.)

5. What diseases set people aside in your own community? Does your congregation have a way of reaching out and including such people in the fullness of life?

At the end of Mark 1, we sense the tension between *telling* and *not telling* that was introduced with the troubling spirits or demons in 1:25 and 1:34. Jesus wishes to shape the way that people perceive his mission and respond to his identity. But, ironically, as the first chapter comes to a close it is Jesus who can no longer travel about freely. Yet those who were once forced to the margins by possession or disease are now free to live normally among other people. Do you sense how highlighting this tension helps to draw us deeply into the narrative? Now we are even more curious to learn what happens next.

6. What have we learned in Mark 1:1-45 about Jesus and his true identity? At the start of his public ministry what is it about Jesus that most interests you?

Looking Ahead

"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" the demons cry out in Mark 1:24. Theirs is the chief question for this first session. The Gospel of Mark was written not only to record stories about Jesus, but to allow the revelation of God in Jesus Christ to speak to us as the living, life-defining Word of God.

As you prepare for session two in

the coming weeks, let the question "What have you to do with us" speak deeply to your own life. Continue to notice the ways in which this ancient account of Jesus' identity and Jesus' actions intersect your own life. (See "Burning Bush Chaser," p. 6.)

Closing Prayer

Living God, just as you called others to follow and serve Jesus Christ in ancient days, send us out as ones who have been given a new identity as women of faith. Amen. ☸

The Rev. Patricia Lull is executive director of the St. Paul Area Council of Churches. She is an ELCA pastor who has served as a parish pastor, director of campus ministry in the ELCA, and as dean of students at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.

If Time Permits: An Open Exchange

Now, imagine that you are a visitor in another country. As a guest and an outsider, you would be eager to hear from a native about the most interesting sites to visit and the most important events to experience. Who could you ask to help you think about the Gospel of Mark from a perspective that differs from your own? (See "Back in Jesus' Day," p. 16.)

Jumping ahead in the narrative, we meet a "certain young man" in Mark 14:51-52 during the arrest of Jesus in Gethsemane. Read this passage and try to imagine who this young man at the edge of the story might be.

Like that young man at the edge of the biblical text, responses from those outside the community of faith (or at least from beyond your study circle) can help you hear these chapters of Mark's Gospel in a fresh way. If you have such a conversation partner, read Mark 14:51-52 together. Talk about the many ideas about Jesus that people hold today as you discuss these questions.

7. Who has helped you discover your own identity? Are there values that seem to be missing from the churches you have known? If you could ask any question of God what would it be?



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GRACE NOTES

New Beginnings

by Linda Post Bushkofsky



For most, the new year

begins in January. For me, however, I've always thought the year begins in September with the start of school. Forty-seven years ago this month, I started kindergarten, and my love affair with sharpened pencils, pristine notebooks, and gathering with old and new friends began. Hopefulness and excitement over new possibilities filled the air.

Today I remain a student of life, but my official days in a classroom have long since passed. Yet I still get excited each September, and this year it is especially so. I am looking forward to a new beginning that has the potential to point more people to our organization.

By now you've noticed the cover of your magazine looks different. *Lutheran Woman Today* has become *Gather*. This name change brings new possibilities and much hopefulness. *Gather* offers a more open and inviting image, welcoming more women, both those within the ELCA and also those who are our ecumenical partners. We can gather with these partners for faith and action, as our new tagline suggests. The name *Gather* makes it easier for more women to come to the great content the magazine offers.

Lutheran women in America have published magazines for more than 100 years. The content, focus, and names have varied throughout the years. We've had *Mission Tidings*, *Lutheran Woman's Work*, *Lutheran Women's World*, *Scope*, *Lutheran Women*, *Women's Missionary Outlook*, *Lutheran Mission Worker*, and *Lutheran Woman Today*.

What has remained the one constant throughout all those magazines and the women they served? Lutheran women gathering together in Christ's name. They gathered together for study and service. They gathered together for advocacy and fellowship. They gathered together for worship and prayer. These days, as we celebrate 25 years of Women of the ELCA now ready to begin another 25 years of vital ministry, we continue to gather together in Christ's name.

Changing a magazine's name is not a decision made lightly. A name change had been talked about for many years. The current staff undertook considerable research, consulting with subscribers as well as Lutheran women who were not subscribers. Focus groups were facilitated. Brainstorming sessions were held with former editors and current authors. Surveys were conducted. The church-wide executive board was consulted and ultimately endorsed the name change.

With *Gather*, we are updating the magazine's image while remaining faithful to Women of the ELCA's commitments and traditional audiences. We are garnering a fresh appeal for younger and less-traditional constituencies. And that brings me much hope.

So share *Gather* with the women in your congregation—women whom you know well and women who may be less familiar to you. This might be a great year to give *Gather* as a gift to a friend or relative or a new family at church. 🌿

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.

To subscribe or order a gift subscription, call 800-328-4648.



AMEN!

With Baptized Eyes

by Catherine Malotky

Here is how I wish it worked, God. Baptize, dry off, and live happily ever after. No family fusses, no self-doubt, no complex decisions...just the right path, clear and obvious, and me, able to follow it.

Unfortunately, that's not how it works. What is clear and true is that I was named and claimed as yours. I was yours before the water drenched my head—you made me, after all. But in baptism, your claim on me and my belonging to you was made public.

That's pretty much where the clarity ends. Like Jesus in the Gospel of Mark, the wilderness is next. For me, too. Once baptized, I've got to figure out what it means that I am claimed by you, and in the world I live in, that's not obvious. As was true for Jesus, there are temptations. The obvious ones aren't so sneaky. If the devil asked me to jump off a mountain, I'd pay attention to physics and probably say no. If the devil asked me to kill my neighbor, I'd probably say no. If the devil asked me to face off with a lion, I'd demur, I'm sure. The odds aren't in my favor.

It's the less obvious stuff that I'm worried about. If the devil seduces me into doubting my personal worth, that's harder to ignore. There are lots of sources for that message that don't resemble the devil at all. Like standards in our world, standards for beauty, physical ability, intelligence, success, grace, and wealth. The truth is we rarely measure up. And if those messages get under our baptismal skin, we can too quickly find

ourselves peering into a mirror like the wicked queen in "Snow White." And if we see nothing of worth in that mirror, we can do some pretty crazy stuff.

We see it all the time: cruelty toward or shunning those who don't tow the line. For some, it's their choices that we find problematic. For some, however, not measuring up to the culture's standards is not so much their "fault." Remember that homeless person, whose mental illness made it impossible to hold a job, and whose medication costs were beyond paying, and whose body odor (even a couple of pews away) was painfully obvious? Judgments surface, and we face the complexity of following God's timeless command to defend those who do not easily fit in and who need the support of the community.

Sometimes we have work to do, God. Internal work. Sometimes we need to reconnect to your claim on us, so we are equally reconnected to your vision of others. Then we can hold ourselves accountable for being messengers of your mercy and justice. Then we can respond to others without consistently measuring them against our human standards. God, you call us to turn our hearts to your standard of love, that all might find in themselves the one you love, and that we might find in each other the communion of saints, rich with forgiveness and hope. In Jesus' name. Amen. ✞

The Rev. Catherine Malotky, an ELCA pastor, serves at Luther Seminary as a philanthropic adviser. She has served as a parish pastor, editor, teacher, and retreat leader.

TWO QUILTS = 118 BED NETS

Last summer, Nadia Sutherland, chair of the Dorcas Circle at Calvary Lutheran Church, Millbrae, Calif., suggested her group of quilters support the ELCA Malaria Campaign by offering a quilt as a reward for contributions. Ticket sales were so good, the group made a second quilt. By the time the drawing was held at the congregation's Rally Day celebration, \$1,182 had been raised, enough for 118 bed nets.

—Submitted by Arville Finacom



Quilt winner Maria Meyer, left, with Nadia Sutherland and the quilts. Doris Wedemeyer, the other winner, was not present for the drawing.

In 2012–13, the Women of the ELCA is designating the Malaria Campaign as one recipient of its 25th anniversary appeal. To support the Malaria Campaign (www.elca.org/malaria), send a check to Women of the ELCA, P.O. Box 71256, Chicago, IL 60694–1256, with ELCA Malaria Campaign in the memo line. 100 percent of the gift will go to the campaign.

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